

Vegetable of the Month

Onions



The onion is believed to have originated in Asia, though it is likely that onions may have been growing wild on every continent. Dating back to 3500 BC, onions were one of the few foods that did not spoil during the winter months. Our ancestors must have recognized the vegetable's durability and began growing onions for food.

The onion became more than just food after arriving in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the onion, believing that its spherical shape and concentric rings symbolized eternity. Of all the vegetables that had their images created from precious metals by Egyptian artists, only the onion was made out of gold.

Today, onions are used in a variety of dishes and rank sixth among the world's leading vegetable crops. Onions are low in calories and in most nutrients (however, green onions are a good source of Vitamin A.)

Onions not only provide flavor; they also provide health-promoting phytochemicals as well as nutrients. Onions contain quercetin, a flavonoid (one category of antioxidant compounds), and allium.

Selection

Most onions are sold loose by the pound, although some types are sold in bags or small boxes. Look for onions that feel dry and solid all over, with no soft spots or sprouts. The neck should be tightly closed and the outer skin should have a crackly feel and a shiny appearance. Onions should smell mild, even if their flavor is not. Avoid selecting onions with green areas or dark patches.

Storage

Onions should be kept in a cool, dry open space away from bright light. Onions do best in an area that allows for air circulation. Because onions absorb moisture, do not store onions below the sink. Also, do not place onions near potatoes because potatoes give off moisture and produce a gas that causes onions to spoil more quickly. Spring/summer onions usually store for about two weeks and storage onions for about three to four weeks.



Nutrition Facts

Serving Size (148g)	
Servings Per Container	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 60	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 9g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	• Vitamin C 15%
Calcium 2%	• Iron 2%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram:	
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

Varieties

Onions came in a variety of sizes, colors and shapes. They are often broken down into three categories: spring/summer, storage, and pearl onions. Spring/summer onions are grown primarily from fall to spring in warm weather areas and have a soft flesh and a mild or sweet taste. These varieties are generally shipped right after harvesting. Storage onions have a firm flesh, dry, crackly outer skins and have a pungent flavor.

After a brief period of drying, these onions are stored for several months before shipping. Pearl onions are often called white onions and are densely planted to make the onions smaller. There are no nutritional differences among these onion types.

Onions also come in three colors — yellow, red, and white. Approximately 88 percent of the onion crop is devoted to yellow onion production, with about 7 percent red onions and 5 percent white onions.

Yellow onions are full-flavored and are a reliable standby for cooking almost anything. Yellow onions turn a rich, dark brown when cooked and give French Onion Soup its tangy sweet flavor. The red onion, with its wonderful color, is a good choice for fresh uses or in grilling and char-broiling. White onions are the traditional onion used in classic Mexican cuisine. They have a golden color and sweet flavor when sautéed.

Below are some onion varieties:

Variety	Availability
CARZALIA SWEETS	June-August
MAUI SWEETS	Year Round
N.E. TRANSPLANTS	July-September
SWEET IMPERIALS	April-June
SWEET SPANISH	August-April
TEXAS SPRING SWEETS	March-June
VIDALIA SWEETS	April-June
WALLA WALLA SWEETS	June-August

Source: National Onion Board

Preparation

Onions may be eaten raw or cooked. Onions should be peeled before preparing, except when baking. Onions may be boiled, braised, baked, microwaved, or sautéed.

Onion Trivia

- According to an old English Rhyme, the thickness of an onion skin can help predict the severity of the winter. Thin skins mean a mild winter is coming while thick skins indicate a rough winter ahead.
- If you eat onions you can get rid of onion breath by eating parsley.
- Americans eat 18.8 pounds of fresh and storage type onions on average each year.

Make Onions Part of Your 5 A Day Plan



- Use raw or cooked onions to season stews, soups, tomato sauces or cooked vegetables.
- Small pearl onions make a great side dish when seasoned with thyme.
- Enjoy onions on their own stuffed and baked.
- Stuff onions with chopped vegetables and rice or bread crumbs.
- Add raw onions to salads or fresh vegetable trays.
- Include onions to add crunch and flavor to dressings, relishes, or sauces.

Recipes



Baked Onions

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

4 medium sweet onions

3/4 cup water

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

2 tsp cornstarch

2 Tbsp water

Preheat oven to 350° F. Peel the onions. Place them side by side into a small casserole. Pour the water and balsamic vinegar over and around the onions, and bake for 2 hours. When softened, thicken remaining juices with arrowroot or cornstarch mixture. Serve onions with the sauce.

Nutritional analysis per serving:
calories 56, protein 1g, fat 0g, percent calories from fat 3%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrate 13g, fiber 2g, sodium 9mg

Onion Salsa Salad

Makes 6 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

Source: Plantation Produce Company

- 1 cup diced onions
- 1 small can diced pimento
- 1/2 cup green onion
- 1/4 cup chopped jalapeno (optional)
- 8 oz black eye peas
- 1 cup bell peppers, diced
- 1 oz chopped garlic
- 1/4 cup nonfat Italian dressing

Combine all items. Let marinate overnight for best flavor. Serve as a side dish or as an appetizer with low fat crackers.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 63, protein 3g, fat 0g, percent calories from fat 2%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrate 13g, fiber 3g, sodium 347mg

Sweet Onion-Pineapple Salsa

Makes 5 servings (1/2 cup each)

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

- 1/2 cup chopped sweet onion
- 2 cups pineapple
- 1/2 cup diced red bell pepper
- 1 Tbsp chopped cilantro
- 1 Tbsp chopped jalapeno
- 1 Tbsp lime juice

Combine all ingredients, stirring until blended.



Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 42, protein 1g, fat 0g, percent calories from fat 6%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrate 10g, fiber 1g, sodium 2mg

Chick-Peas with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

red onion, small, sliced crosswise and separated into rings

1/2 tsp rosemary, dried, crumbled

1 tomato, medium, chopped

2 1/2 cup chick-peas, canned, rinsed and drained

1 tbsp olive oil

1/2 cup vegetable stock, low-sodium

1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar

2 Tbsp sun-dried tomato bits

In a large no-stick frying pan over medium-high heat, warm the oil. Add the onions and rosemary; cook, stirring frequently, for 2 to 3 minutes, or until tender. Stir in the stock and chopped tomatoes. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes, or until all the liquid has evaporated. Stir in the chick-peas, tomato bits and vinegar; cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or until heated through.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 195, protein 9g, fat 6g, percent calories from fat 27%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrate 28g, fiber 6g, sodium 77mg

Spicy Pork Tenderloin Pitas

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals three 5 A Day servings



- 8 oz pork tenderloin
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 garlic, clove, minced
- 1 cucumber, peeled and diced
- 1/2 tsp dill, dried
- 1 green pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 cup spinach, shredded
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp oregano, dried
- 1 cup sour cream, nonfat
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced into rings
- 4 pita breads, halved
- 8 cherry tomatoes, halved

In a small bowl, combine the cucumbers, sour cream and dill. Refrigerate until needed.

Cut the pork across the grain into 1/2-inch cutlets, then slice each piece into thin strips. In a large bowl, combine the mustard, oil, lemon juice, garlic and oregano. Add the pork and toss well to coat all the pieces. Let stand about 10 minutes. Coat a large no-stick frying pan with no-stick spray and place over medium heat for 3 minutes. Working in bunches to avoid overcrowding in the pan, add the pork and saute for about 3 minutes or until cooked through. Transfer to a plate. Place peppers and onions in a 9" glass pie plate. Cover with vented plastic wrap and microwave on high for 3 minutes or until soft. Add the onions and peppers to the pan; saute for 3 minutes, or until lightly browned. Top pork mixture with peppers and onions.

Line the pita pockets with the spinach. Add the pork mixture. Top each sandwich half with a tomato and some cucumber sauce.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 314, protein 26g, fat 9g, percent calories from fat 11%, cholesterol 38mg, carbohydrate 35g, fiber 3g, sodium 377mg